

Testimony notes of Susan DeMaria, Regional Organizer, NOLSW, UAW Local 2320

Legal Service workers are selfless, committed public servants. They are underpaid and overworked. During bad economic times for an individual or family, legal services is often the last resort between food and no food, housing and homelessness.

But, these are committed legal people. They are committed to providing the most needy of our citizens with getting their basic needs met. These people are in need of shelter, food, finances, health and safety from domestic violence.

Legal services is the last resort for these poor people. As you can imagine, during this economic recession, the number of people in need has greatly increased. The calls from people in needs have increased. The number of poor people have increases. Peoples needs have increased. And, just at a time when legal services is needed more than ever, their budget from IOLTA is substantially decreased.

What do many of these selfless, committed people do? They take a pay cut in the form of hours reduced, reduced pension and increased contributions to health coverage.

At Connecticut Legal Services, the entire workforce agreed to a 20% pay cut. As lawyers and paralegals, they could get much better paying jobs in the public and private sector. The attorney salaries range from \$51,000 to \$99,000. Ninety-nine thousand is received only after working in legal services for 21 years! Paralegals start at \$34,000. Imagine being a young lawyer, raising a family and earning \$40,000 a year.

After the IOLTA cuts, these legal service workers agreed to have their salaries frozen. Their health plan was changed to a lesser plan. How many actually have reduced their workload is unclear and not apparent. At the New Haven Legal Assistance Program, 3 paralegals were laid off after a 50% loss in IOLTA funding. The remainder paralegals and support staff agreed to put a hold on their employer pension contribution.

When the economic times are grim, these legal service workers are the people most needed for those who are hurt by the economy. Without them, the poor is left unprotected and vulnerable.